

MY IMPRESSIONS OF MECCA AND MEDINA

(By Maulvi S. M. Abdullah, Imam Berlin Mosque)

Having bid good-bye to my dear home and my people on the 26th of January 1938, I reached Berlin, where I have formed my second home, on the 5th of April 1938. During this long and sometimes tiresome journey extending over two months, I could not find time to write anything for the "Light." I shall try to recollect and pen down some of the most important impressions and valuable experiences of my pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina and visits to Egypt and Turkey. To-day only about Hejaz.

On the 26th of January I along with my wife and child left Karachi by S. S. Englestan of the Haj line and reached Jeddah on Friday the 4th of February. The sea-voyage was very pleasant and comfortable. This boat, being the last Pilgrims-ship carried some of the officials of the Scindia Steam Navigation Co., and also Maulana Ismail Ghazawi, president of the All-India Pilgrims protection League. Maulvi Nek Mohammed was the Amir-ul-Haj. A large room was consecrated for the purpose of the Mosque where regular prayers were held. We had a very good time on board the ship and the management and behaviour of the crew was praiseworthy and most satisfactory in every respect. Every Muslim should try to sail by the Haj line as this is a purely Indian concern and is not run by the English-men, as is the case with the Mughal line.

While still on board the ship we reached a place named "Yalamlam" where we took a bath and discarded our ordinary clothes and put on the "Ihram" towels. From now on the whole atmosphere is entirely changed and every one on board the ship is heard repeating the following words:

*"Labbayka, Allahuma Labbayka,
Labbayka la Sharika Laka Labbayka
Innalhamdu wanni 'mata Laka wal Mulka
La Sharika Laka Labbayka."*

which means:

"Here I am, O God, at Thy command.
Here I am; Thou hast no partner, Here I am.

Truly Praise and Grace and Lordship are Thine.

Thou hast no partner. Here I am."

We reached Mecca on the 5th of February. There being no roads in Hejaz, the journey is not a comfortable one. But the moment one reaches the Holy precinct of the Sacred territory of Mecca one forgets all the toil and the turmoil of the way and one feels consoled and comforted.

On the evening of the 6th February, a banquet was given by H. M. The King to some of the prominent Indian Pilgrims. Similar feasts are given to the representatives of various other nations. This year the pilgrimage (the great gathering consisting of over a lakh of

people at the plain of Arafat) took place on the 9th of February. During the pilgrims-days 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th of Zil-hij entirely a new world is created in Arafat, in Mina and around the Kaaba. The condition of the pilgrims on these days is worth-seeing and hardly possible to portray it through pen. Lady Zainab Cobbold, who is an English convert to Islam and has performed her pilgrimage writes the following in her book "Pilgrimage to Mecca":

"It would require a master pen to describe that scene, poignant in its intensity of that great concourse of humanity of which I was one small unit, completely lost to their surroundings in a fervour of religious enthusiasm. Many of the pilgrims had tears streaming down their cheeks; others raised their faces to the starlit sky that has witnessed this drama so often in the past centuries. The shining eyes, the passionate appeals, the pitiful hands outstretched in prayer moved me in a way that nothing had ever done before, and I felt caught up in a strong wave of spiritual exaltation. I was one with the rest of the pilgrims in a sublime act of complete surrender to the Supreme Will which is Islam...and it was with a feeling of deepest gratitude and reverence that I joined the throng to circuit the Kaaba."

Pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam and thus it is one of the greatest and deepest desire of every true believer, man as well as woman, to be able to perform this sacred duty. We are extremely thankful to God-Almighty, who enabled us to fulfil this hearts-desire of ours.

On the 19th of February 1938, I had the honour of meeting H. M. The King Sultan Abdul Aziz Ibn-Saud, the simple but majestic king of Arabia. I was introduced to him by his Secretary S. Yusuf Yasin. His Majesty rose from his seat to receive me and after having shaking hands, asked me to take seat on his right. Then according to the Arabian custom of hospitality coffee was served. The talk began on the all important subject of "Unity of Islam means the unity of Muslims." I was astonished to find the great learning and vast knowledge of this Desert King. His knowledge of the Holy Quran and of the traditions was simply amazing. He quoted verses upon verses from out of the Holy Book and innumerable sayings of the Holy Prophet in support of his arguments. His magnanimity of heart, his simplicity of life, his majestic and austere look, his command over the Islamic teachings and his piety are things which one cannot pass over unnoticed.

On the 21st of February we dined with the Chief Assistant to the Minister of foreign affairs, and then on the 23rd left for Medina. We spent a week there and used to offer our humble salutations on the grave of the Holy Prophet.

On the 5th of March we left back for Jeddah and waited for our boat for Suez.

MY IMPRESSIONS OF EGYPT AND TURKEY—II

(By Dr. Abdullah, Imam Berlin Mosque)

On the 8th of March 1938 we left the Holy places (Mecca and Medina) by an Egyptian Pilgrimage—S. S. Zamzem. One could see the contrast between the Indian-pilgrimage and the Egyptian one. This boat, contrary to the Indian one, was well-equipped with wireless set, piano and a Cinema apparatus. A film, which depicted the arrival of "Mehmal" and Pilgrims from Egypt and the various ceremonies connected with the Haj, such as Tawwaf, Saiy, journey to Mina, Arafaat, Medina etc, was screened on board the ship. Most of the Egyptian ladies wore no veil. This boat brought us to a place named "Tor," 2 days journey from Jeddah, where all the pilgrims had to spend three days in Quarantine. Another Egyptian boat—S. S. Kawser then brought us to Suez in a day's time.

From Suez we motored down to Cairo—city with 1,000 Mosques. Here there are not only innumerable mosques, but some of the finest ones of the Muslim world. Cairo is divided into two parts—the old one and the new one. The new or the modern part is just like any European town. The mode of living, dress etc., is like that of any town in Europe. Women don't observe Purdah. Men go clean shaven; but all with Fez as their headgear. On Fridays the Mosques are usually overfilled with devotees and sometimes it is difficult to find a place if one happens to be late for the Khutbah. The King prays in various mosques by rotation. "Woman" is however conspicuous by her absence from all the mosques in Cairo and there are no places reserved for them, whereas in Kaaba (Mecca) and the Mosque of the Holy Prophet (Mdina) there are places set apart for the women and they visit the mosques in large numbers. Cairo possesses the oldest and perhaps the largest University of the world—Al-Azhar, which is a mosque also. There are about 10,000 students on her roll and about 300 professors and teachers on her staff. The teaching time is from 8 to 12 noon, when no visitors are allowed to enter the mosque, which is open to foreigner only in the afternoon. Cairo has now got a new and a modern University with all the important faculties, such as law, philosophy, science etc.

After a week's stay we left for Istanbul, where we reached on the 25th of March. Istanbul is one of the old cities of Turkey. It has very beautiful scenery. There are many fine and beautiful mosques in old Istanbul, whereas new part of Istanbul has "modern mosques." It may be of interest to learn that the so called modern mosques are fundamentally the same as the usual mosques all over the world. We saw the usual place for ablution, the Kibla, the minber etc. Only thing which seemed new was the division of rows through cloth covering the places for "Sajdah." Otherwise the form of the prayer was the same old one and the language the Arabic one. The only divergence was in the case of the call for the prayer, which was in the Turkish translation

instead of the Arabic original. Although Friday is not an official holiday (and it need not be), still mosques are so over-crowded that after the second Azan there is hardly a place for the late-comers. Contrary to the custom prevalent in Egypt, the mosques in Turkey are attended by the female sex and special places, either in the form of galleries or side-rooms are reserved for the ladies, who also turn up in large numbers.